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SUBJECT: New U.S. Approach toward Southeast Asia Opens Possibilities for Cooperation on Burma

REF: A) HANOI 861; B) HANOI 859

CLASSIFIED BY: Virginia Palmer, Deputy Chief of Mission, State, Hanoi; REASON: 1.4(B)

(C) Over lunch October 15 with MFA Americas Department Director General Nguyen Ba Hung, DCM reiterated the USG interest in working with Vietnam as 2010 chair of ASEAN to make progress on Burma and asked Ba Hung if the GVN had any concrete ideas in this area. Ba Hung welcomed the USG's Burma policy review, and particularly the decision to include Burma in the U.S.-ASEAN Summit meeting. He said the MFA is considering options for engagement, but would be in a better position to discuss specifics after the November Summit. Ba Hung, who accompanied Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Khiem during his meetings in Washington earlier this month, stressed that Vietnam is willing to do its part to help on Burma. Washington's new flexibility has created additional opportunities for ASEAN and Vietnam to engage Burma, he said, adding that there are strong indications the Burmese government wants to decrease its dependence on China and increase engagement with other nations in the region, particularly ASEAN countries. Burma "trusts" Vietnam. This coupled with the new U.S. approach gives Vietnam greater scope to influence Burma. In terms of next steps, Vietnam believes the ball is in Burma's court to respond to the new U.S. approach and overtures. It is important for Vietnam and ASEAN to see how Burma responds. In response to the DCM's statement that the release of Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) was key to progress in other areas, Ba Hung said that during a recent visit to Burma (reftel A), a senior Vietnamese delegation sent a "clear message" to Burmese leaders on the need to pursue a "policy of reconciliation." In what could have been a reference to ASSK, Ba Hung said "we Vietnamese have our own way of conveying messages to governments like Burma."

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